

AMERICAN GINSENG (*Panax quinquefolius*)**Description**

Ginseng is an aromatic, perennial, herbaceous plant. It has a fleshy, fusiform root and solitary stem that grows 4-20 inches tall. Plants have 3 to 5 palmately compound leaves each with 3 to 5 leaflets with serrated edges. The greenish-white flowers are in solitary terminal umbels. Fruits are bright red drupes.

Distribution

Ginseng grows in deciduous woods throughout much of the eastern United States and Canada. The ginseng populations in Nebraska are on the western edge of the species' range. In Nebraska it is limited to deciduous forests along the Missouri River and is presently known from only five sites ranging from Richardson County in far southeast Nebraska to Dixon County in northeast Nebraska. Fewer than 20 plants occur in each known population. Other populations of ginseng likely occur within Missouri River bluff forests in Nebraska.

Habitat

Ginseng grows only in rich, cool, moist, possibly older-growth, deciduous forest, such as those found along the Missouri River in eastern Nebraska. Within the Missouri River bluff forests, the plant is found especially on the mid and lower slopes. Overstory trees present within these forests include bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), basswood (*Tilia americana*), hickories (*Carya* spp.), and black walnut (*Juglans nigra*). Soils at the sites are typically loamy and formed in loess. The plant is typically associated with high quality, relatively undisturbed forest habitat.

Status

Global: G3-Vulnerable. Federally not listed. State Threatened. Nebraska S1-Critically Imperiled. The greatest threat to American ginseng is irresponsible digging of its wild roots for export. The other primary cause of the ginseng's decline is the loss, degradation, and alteration of habitat. Many of Nebraska's native forests have been logged and the sites converted to cropland or pastures. Logging continues to be a moderate threat to eastern Nebraska forests. Residential development in forests is a primary threat, especially near the Omaha metropolitan area. Grazing is known to be detrimental to ginseng populations. Most of Nebraska's native forests are currently grazed by cattle or have been grazed in the past. Harvesting of ginseng is a primary threat to the species throughout its range. While collection of ginseng is known to occur in Nebraska, it is not known to what extent ginseng is currently collected here. However, given the small population sizes in the state, any collecting could be detrimental to those populations. These small, isolated populations are vulnerable to being eliminated by chance human-induced or natural catastrophic events.

Management

The identification of the plant and careful management of the area in which it is found is extremely important to conserve this species. Proper management and protection of high quality mature Northeastern and Southeastern Upland Forests from conversion to cropland or pastureland is probably the most important management practice currently available for this species.

More Information

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?sPCODE=Q1BC>